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ABSTRACT

Nearly every state has adopted or is in the process of adopting content and performance standards for education. This guide summarizes some of the lessons learned in developing standards. It also provides tips and strategies from early leaders in standards development to help educators and policymakers who are working on new forms of assessment. The lessons that were learned about involving the public in enacting standards also apply to new assessments. They are: (1) public involvement and policy development and implementation are inseparable; (2) listen first, talk later; (3) teacher involvement is essential; (4) show how new approaches enhance rather than replace old methods; (5) expect criticism and respond without becoming preoccupied; (6) understand that results take time; (7) demystify reforms; (8) communicate the big picture to the public; (9) be willing to adjust based on public and educator needs and concerns; and (10) build a strategic communications plan. Concerns about new assessments are likely to involve new formats and reporting, the technical accuracy of the assessment, and low scores as the tests are initiated. Other probable concerns are the consequences of assessment, teachers' roles, and the costs of new assessments. Thirteen resource organizations are listed for further help. (SLD)

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So You Have Standards

Now What?

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IS THIS GUIDE FOR YOU?

It is if you:

- Are a state-level policymaker who needs to understand how to better involve the public in issues related to standards and assessments
- Work at the state level and are responsible for standards and/or assessment design and implementation
- Are a public involvement professional at the state or local level
- Are a member of a coalition or community group interested in promoting standards-led reforms.

So You Have Standards . . . Now What?

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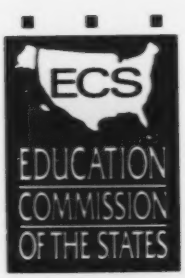

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So You Have Standards . . . Now What?

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PRE-TEST ON STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENT
WHAT'S YOUR PROBABLE SUCCESS QUOTIENT?

True or False?		True	False
1.	Once standards have been adopted and sent to every district, the state job is done.	⬭	⬭
2.	If the public objects to standards or new assessments, the best strategy is to increase the marketing budget.	⬭	⬭
3.	The majority of the public supports higher standards and increased accountability.	⬭	⬭
4.	Most teachers already know how to use standards in their classroom practice.	⬭	⬭
5.	Assessments measuring student progress on standards look different and can lead to public concern and lack of public support.	⬭	⬭
6.	The best sequence for implementing standards is to work with experts to get the policies right first, then involve the public.	⬭	⬭
7.	Assessments make people take a closer look at the standards.	⬭	⬭
8.	To promote accountability, "high stakes" must be attached to new assessments right away.	⬭	⬭
9.	Performance assessments will cost more than traditional norm-referenced tests.	⬭	⬭
10.	Most students will do better on assessments that are based on achieving high standards.	⬭	⬭

Answers are on the next page!

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Scoring

Give yourself a point for each one you answered correctly.

1. ____ False
2. ____ False
3. ____ True
4. ____ False
5. ____ True
6. ____ False
7. ____ True
8. ____ False
9. ____ True
10. ____ False

If you scored 0-3	Polish your resume ... or read this guide!
If you scored 4-6	Rethink some of your approaches! This guide provides some good tips.
If you scored 7-9	You are on the right track! You may want to use some strategies from other states and districts that are described in this guide.
If you scored 10	You have a solid approach to implementing standards-led assessments. Pass this guide on to a friend!

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

So You Have Standards . . . Now What? is a guide for education policymakers and public involvement professionals whose states or communities have standards in place and are developing new assessments to measure student, school and district progress.

Standards are just the first of a number of new policies unfolding around the nation. Nearly every state has adopted or is in the process of developing content and performance standards. Next on the horizon are new assessments that measure progress toward achieving the standards and make it possible to target improvement efforts effectively. This guide summarizes some of the lessons learned when developing standards and provides tips and strategies from early leaders on how to involve educators, the public and parents in new forms of assessment. Without teacher and public support, new ways of gauging student progress are guaranteed to fail.

Ten "lessons learned" about involving the public in enacting standards also apply to new assessments. They are:

1. Public involvement is inseparable from policy development and implementation.
2. Listen to people first, talk later.
3. If you do not involve teachers, expect to fail.
4. Show how new approaches enhance rather than replace old methods.
5. Expect criticism and respond to it, but don't become preoccupied with it.
6. Understand that it takes time to get results and set expectations accordingly. Document progress toward results and report it when it is achieved.
7. Demystify reforms. Don't just tell people about new standards and assessments; show them examples.
8. Communicate the big picture to the public while reserving technical discussion for teachers and other implementers.
9. Be willing to adjust plans based on public and educator needs and concerns.
10. Build a strategic communications plan designed around people's questions and needs, and use it throughout the assessment development process.

So You Have Standards . . . Now What? offers a forecast of the concerns the public may raise about assessments, including a list of questions policymakers and public involvement professionals are likely to hear, as well as tips for meeting the challenges ahead.

Concerns about new assessments are likely to include:

1. *New formats and reporting:* Why do these tests and scores look so different?
2. *Technical accuracy*: How do we know these tests are reliable and valid?
3. *Low scores*: Why are so many students doing poorly on the new tests?
4. *Consequences:* Should assessment scores influence grades, promotion, graduation or teacher salaries, and if so, when?
5. *Teachers' role*: Can teachers administer and score these new assessments *and* explain them clearly to parents?
6. *Cost:* Why is it so expensive to create and administer the new assessments?

While this guide provides some tips and strategies for addressing the public's concerns about new assessments, policymakers and public involvement professionals will benefit from further examination of these issues. The resources section of this guide offers a good start on how to learn more.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The challenge facing American education is to help all students learn at higher levels than ever before. In response to this challenge, 48 states and thousands of school districts across the nation are establishing clear, high academic standards that apply to all students. But is that enough?

No, say proponents of a standards-led education system. Standards are just the first step to improve student achievement. Other state and local policies must be aligned to support standards, including *developing assessments that measure progress toward meeting the standards.*

Assessments are critical because they reveal how well students, schools and districts are meeting the standards. Assessments pinpoint shortfalls in achievement, making it possible to target improvement efforts where they are needed and then to gauge how effective these initiatives are.

Standards are just the first step to improve student achievement. Other state and local policies must be aligned to support standards, including developing assessments that measure progress toward meeting the standards.

Involve the public as you create new assessments

But, if they are to be successful, new assessments and a host of other improvements — such as new methods of teaching and new ways of managing schools — must be tied to continuing efforts to involve the public in efforts to reform education systems.

What does it mean to involve the public? It does not mean "spinning," selling and marketing school improvements at a furious pitch. Rather, involving the public is a consistent effort to listen long and hard to your community, understand people's needs and concerns, take these issues seriously, and be prepared to let them influence the *policy design and implementation.*

Such an approach reflects a new way of understanding public involvement, one that recognizes the need to build the community's involvement and understanding *during policy creation* — and not after the fact. The result: better-supported policies, better-understood policies and, perhaps most important, better policies.

DEFINING TERMS

Content Standards

Content standards are statements that clearly define what students should know and be able to do in various subject areas and at different points in their education.

Performance Standards

Performance standards provide concrete examples and explicit definitions of how well students must learn the material represented by content standards. Performance "levels" also may be used to define students' demonstrated proficiency at various points as they progress toward a standard.

Assessment

Assessment is a measure of what a student knows and is able to do, usually expressed in terms of progress toward a standard or mastery of a standard. Assessment can include diverse measures such as multiple-choice tests, performance assessments and portfolios to show what — and how well — a student has mastered a content standard.

Portfolios

Portfolios are collections of student work designed to show progress over time and level of accomplishment.

Accountability Systems

Accountability systems show the public, parents and policymakers how well schools are doing their job of educating students. Accountability systems describe a set of education goals, identify roles and responsibilities, measure student progress, and inform and involve all stakeholders in analyzing results and suggesting strategies for change.

History proves this point. When education leaders have tried to "sell" standards and other new policies that did not incorporate public input and address community concerns, their efforts have failed. It's not simply a matter of whether the standards were communicated effectively; often, the question is whether the standards were soundly conceived and developed — and if they compare favorably to other highly regarded standards.

In contrast, reform leaders who have actively sought public involvement created better policies as a result of the back-and-forth dialogue with their communities. Such two-way communication helps policymakers pinpoint legitimate concerns about reforms, refine their innovations and test the assumptions underlying their initiatives. All of these activities build credibility, ties to the community *and* more trusted reforms.

In Kentucky, for example, education officials are undertaking further testing and refining of mathematics portfolios before using them as assessments to determine school accountability. Because the state has been sensitive to the public's concerns about the reliability of new assessments, the portfolios that emerge are more likely to be a sounder method of assessment than they would have been without public input. In turn, a more reliable and proven assessment process has an understandably stronger chance of gaining public support than an untested, still-questionable procedure.

Lessons learned and challenges ahead

The Kentucky example illustrates how education reform leaders are simultaneously addressing two areas of education reform that are inextricably woven — public involvement and policy development.

Fortunately, leaders in both areas have generated a number of lessons that are provided in this guide to help you move smoothly from developing standards into the next phase of policy implementation — creating standards-led assessment systems.

In addition to lessons learned, this guide summarizes the key issues you can expect to face as you design and implement new assessments. *So You Have Standards . . . Now What?* also includes tested tips and strategies collected through extensive interviews with education leaders and officials in the states and districts where new assessments are well under way.

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In combining the lessons learned from the past with a forecast of future challenges, this guide provides practical guidance based on the best thinking and practices available. ECS encourages you to learn more about the resources that can help you develop better education policies and involve the public more effectively. For more information, see the section on Resources for Communicating About Standards and Assessments at the end of this guide.

The public's views on standards and assessments

How can you make sure new policies address the needs and concerns of your community? Public opinion research can give you a head start in understanding people's views on the issues. Below is a sampling of some important findings.

- Six out of 10 (60%) voters believe public schools set their standards of performance too low.[1]
- More than 85% of parents approve of holding students to higher academic standards and measuring learning by using both multiple choice and student portfolios.[2]
- Parents want higher standards, while teachers are not as sure; most of both groups think expecting every child to meet them may be too much.[3]
- Eighty eight percent of parents turn to teachers for their information about education.[4]
- Parents rely more on teachers than standardized tests for learning about their child's progress in school.[5]
- The majority of parents give higher approval ratings to performance assessments than to standardized tests.[6]
- Ninety percent of Americans say teaching the basics is "absolutely essential," as do 99% of leaders, 98% of teachers and 100% of school administrators.[7]
- Eighty percent of Americans feel teaching computer skills is "absolutely essential."[8]
- Only 33% of the public says public schools are better than private ones.[9]

By understanding public views, policymakers can be sensitive to concerns by addressing them in the development of policy or in how policies are phased in.

The next chapter, "Lessons Learned," examines the importance of listening to the public at every stage of policy development.

CHAPTER 2
LESSONS LEARNED

The following "lessons learned" represent the best thinking of many of the early leaders in standards-led reform efforts. Following the lessons are examples of how they are put into practice. Sources for the examples include the Statewide Systemic Initiatives supported by the National Science Foundation, New American Schools, New Standards and a selection of other leading state and local education pioneers.

Lesson 1. Public involvement is inseparable from policy development and implementation.

Both activities must be pursued in the same continuous, comprehensive effort to revamp the education system. It is impossible to marshal public support for poorly planned and executed policies that were developed without community input. At the same time, even the best policies are likely to fail if they are not publicly understood and supported.

→ Example: Since its beginning in 1992, the New Directions for Education in Delaware initiative has sought local involvement and endorsement of standards-led reform at every step along the way. Even though this process is sometimes difficult and messy, the public needs to be involved in seeing, understanding and critiquing reform plans, explains Mary Rowley, a public relations consultant to the Delaware Department of Public Instruction. In Delaware, four Curriculum Frameworks Commissions composed of teachers, community members and business representatives developed academic standards over a three-year period. The standards were debated and discussed in open public meetings that gave the commissions multiple opportunities to forge consensus and create a set of content standards that have been recognized as exemplary by educators throughout the nation.

New Directions is using a similar process to establish a comprehensive assessment system. Groups of teachers, administrators, parents and others are designing a system that will measure individual student progress toward the new state content standards. The groups not only are creating the assessment procedures, but also suggesting ways in which the new assessment system can be communicated to parents and other community members.

Lesson 2. Listen to people first, talk later.

Communication efforts begin with identifying your community's specific concerns. Meetings, one-on-one conversations, focus groups or surveys are useful ways to pinpoint the most crucial local issues. When you respond to people's questions, first take steps to solve the problems they have identified; they will be more likely to be interested in the other things you have to say. Remember that listening is an ongoing process, not something to be done once at the beginning of a major change.

→ Example: CONNECT (Colorado's Statewide Systemic Initiative in Mathematics and Science) conducted a statewide opinion poll on the public's support for standards and new types of assessments. The study found high support for standards across the state, but very little understanding of the intricacies of standards-led reform and new types of assessments. The Governor's Office and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) used the poll data to develop a booklet of sample performance tasks in mathematics. This booklet has been used extensively by CONNECT, the CDE, the Colorado Association of School Boards and a business coalition, *Teaming for Results*, to help board members, business leaders and parents better understand how performance tasks and other traditional measures can be used to judge a student's progress on standards.

Lesson 3. If you do not involve teachers, expect to fail.

The experience of districts across the country clearly illustrates that if teachers are not informed and active participants in school improvement, reform efforts will fail. Teachers are parents' prime source of information about what is happening at their child's school and how their child is performing, research shows. Teachers need to be partners in reform efforts with their schools and districts.

→ Example: Maine's Statewide Systemic Initiative, the Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance created seven regional "Beacon Centers" to provide innovative classroom activities for students and inservice training for teachers. Staff members conduct workshops on teaching strategies, subject matter content and assessment strategies related to mathematics and science standards. They also assist teachers in redesigning their curriculum to be in accord with the statewide content framework, professional development, equity issues and community partnerships at all levels of education. Beacon Center staff not only serve the seven communities in which they are housed, but they also spend at least half their time working with teachers in more than 180 schools outside the Beacon districts.

Lesson 4. Show how new approaches enhance, rather than replace, the old ones.

Research shows that parents and educators support many innovations in education, but not at the expense of teaching the basics. When you introduce something new, show how it works with what is already there. For instance, explain that there will be portfolios and demonstrations of student work, *as well as* more traditional standardized tests. Bridge the gap between people's experiences and the changes being implemented, then show how the changes improve student learning.

→ Example: When Delaware adopted content standards, the state board of education approved the use of an Interim Assessment Program to serve as a bridge between the previously used standardized test and the new state assessment program under development. This interim program assessed student progress in reading, mathematics and writing using test formats from the old and new assessments. During the two years the interim assessment was used, baseline data were collected as well as some of the previously used indicators, showing continued student progress.

Lesson 5. Expect criticism and respond to it, but don't become preoccupied with it.

Anticipate, respond to and involve critics. But remember that some well-organized and particularly vocal opponents of school reform will not be convinced of the merits of your reforms no matter what you do. The goal is to respond calmly to criticism with the hope of reaching citizens who are still making up their minds.

→ Example: When Maryland developed standards and the new state assessment program, conservative groups became vocal that standards might "dumb down" the curriculum. The Maryland Department of Education (MDE) dealt with this head-on by showing the public what the standards and assessments looked like at back-to-school nights. Research information and policymakers' experience in other states told MDE officials they might never sway the opinions of some groups that had a history of opposing *all* previous education reforms. They then focused their energy and communications strategies on the majority of parents and the public who would likely support the reforms once their questions and concerns were addressed. To inform the public, the MDE developed the *Maryland School Performance Assessment Program Parent Handbook*, which answers the most commonly asked questions about the assessment program, shows sample assessment activities, tells parents how they can help their child and lets them know where to get additional information.

Lesson 6. Understand that it takes time to get results and set expectations accordingly. Document progress toward results and report it when it is achieved.

Setting standards is only the first of a series of reforms aimed at raising student achievement. But it takes time for all the necessary changes — from extensive teacher training to new forms of school management — to take effect and result in improved performance. In the meantime, collect data that help you measure incremental progress that points toward success in the long run.

→ Example: The Louisiana Systemic Initiatives Program (LaSIP) is a statewide effort to reform mathematics and science learning. LaSIP has evaluated student achievement extensively to assess the impact of its professional development programs on student performance, and results have been promising. In statewide testings of 5th- and 7th-grade public school students from 1993-95, results showed higher achievement scores for students of LaSIP-trained teachers than for students overall. Preliminary data also indicated that both Caucasian and African-American students who had been in math classes led by LaSIP-trained teachers performed substantially better on both math *and* language arts tests than did their peers taught by non-LaSIP teachers.

Lesson 7. Demystify reforms. Don't just tell people about new standards and assessments, show them examples.

Seeing is believing. A difficult math problem, for example, can instantly show people the level of rigor embodied in a standard, and it can show how a performance assessment asks more of students than a simple multiple-choice test.

→ Example: Partnership for Learning, a business-led organization in Washington State, includes sample test questions in a variety of publications that are read by leading community leaders, employers and political leaders. The Partnership also has shown audiences demonstrations of students estimating and solving complex mathematical calculations without pen, paper or calculators. The way the students use different strategies to arrive at their answers — and then explain them — impresses audience members and helps them understand how learning styles are changing while content becomes more rigorous under the new standards and assessments, notes Bill Porter, who directs Partnership for Learning.

Lesson 8. Communicate the big picture to the public while reserving technical discussions for teachers and other implementers.

Parents and other community members want to understand the big picture, that is, why new assessments are necessary and how they relate to the achievement of high academic standards. Reform leaders should save the nuts and bolts — discussions about student sampling or strategies for training teachers, for example — for teachers, policymakers and assessment designers.

→ Example: The New York State Systemic Initiative (NYSSI) provides information on new reforms at two levels — general information for parents and the public and in-depth assistance to the schools in the Urban Network Project supported by the NYSSI. Teachers and administrators in these research and development (R&D) schools participated in the development and pilot testing of the new state assessment in mathematics and science, while receiving training at a statewide assessment and equity institute to develop their own student portfolios and other classroom assessments to support the New York learning standards. For parents and the public, the NYSSI publishes *SSI Perspectives* three times a year, which explains issues such as new assessments, provides updates on the R&D schools and highlights parent-involvement activities.

Lesson 9. Be willing to adjust education improvement plans based on public and educator needs and concerns.

Every phase of policy development must be accompanied by the opportunity for teachers, administrators, parents, students and community members to learn about the proposed education improvements, examine them and be a part of decisionmaking. If teachers do not understand, support or have a chance to influence new standards and assessments, they are likely to fail in executing them. Similarly, community members must take part in the development of standards and assessments because they offer valuable input and because they are less likely to support polices they had no part in developing.

→ Example: Business leaders in Washington State found the state's draft content standards did not hit the mark, in part because they were written using education jargon that was hard for non-educators to understand. Business executives who reviewed the standards pushed to have them revised and improved. Their voices were heard and taken seriously, and, as a result, the standards are now more understandable to business leaders and the public — and now have a stronger base of public support.

Lesson 10. Build a strategic communications plan designed around people's questions and needs, and use it throughout the assessment development process.

In the process of making changes in schools that will lead to improved student performance, educators often present solutions that do not address the questions and concerns people have. Those solutions, no matter how good they might be, have little chance of being accepted if they don't address what people are worried about. In addition, improvement efforts frequently appear to be a fragmented laundry list of activities that don't relate to one another. A strategic communications plan is a necessary component to any education improvement effort. It creates a process for listening to people, developing policies that address their concerns and needs, and reporting back on progress. It also provides a framework for all communications activity so it becomes clear to people how each proposed change relates to the district's goals.

→ Example: Cincinnati Public Schools, a New American Schools site, developed a strategic communications plan in conjunction with "Students First," the district's five-year strategic school improvement plan. In developing the communications plan, the process itself proved to be a model of how to design and carry out policy. District leaders compiled data from a series of teacher and parent surveys and focus groups. The data offered insights about what both groups needed from the district and what concerns the district must address as changes are made. This information provided the starting point for discussion among a group of community leaders, who were invited to give the district direction in developing the communications plan. Members of the community group had several opportunities along the way to react to drafts of the plan and then individual members of the community group saw ways they could take part in carrying out the plan and supporting the district's improvement strategies.

Into the future

Most of the lessons featured in this chapter evolved during the creation of standards. But they already are proving useful in states and districts designing and putting new assessments in place. The next section of this guide identifies the key issues and questions you can expect as you begin to use new assessments, as well as tips and strategies for meeting challenges.

TO CREATE AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

1. ***Use polls and focus groups to surface the public's concerns about education. You must know where your community stands on education problems before you present solutions.***
2. ***Develop a comprehensive education improvement plan and accompanying public engagement plan.***
3. *Identify audiences and messages. Create messages that respond to distinct audiences yet communicate about the reform.*
4. ***Develop examples, materials and videos. People need the chance to see rather than hear about new standards and assessments.***
5. *Develop local strategies, leadership and capacities. State officials will not succeed if their local counterparts are not equipped to develop and communicate messages.*
6. *Build coalitions. Enlist and maintain the support of influential business and community leaders who can marshal resources behind your cause.*
7. *Anticipate, respond to and involve the critics. You must be ready to respond to their comments.*
8. *Communicate progress. Otherwise your community will not see movement toward the finish line.*

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CHAPTER 3
CHALLENGES AHEAD

What it will take to involve the public, policymakers, parents and teachers in the design and implementation of new assessments

Assessments quickly demonstrate the rigor of a standard and show exactly what it means to achieve it. Assessments make standards real for the first time for many people, according to education pollster Nancy Belden. Assessments generate substantial public interest and, as a result, refocus attention on standards and student achievement.

One reason for the interest in assessments is their familiarity; almost everyone has taken tests and has opinions about them. Further, most parents take their children's test scores personally and seriously. And, test scores have a significant impact on the options available to a student after high school graduation.

The good news is that the keen interest in assessments offers a chance for you to communicate how crucial it is to have sound, reliable tests that provide data about student, school and district performance. Sound assessments are the foundation of an effective education system built on accountability, that is, they are a commitment to measuring how well teaching and learning initiatives are paying off.

Anticipating questions and concerns

Interviews with public involvement leaders in districts and states where reforms are well underway reveal a number of concerns about assessments among parents, teachers, policymakers and the community at large. The main issues raised by assessment include:

1. New formats and reporting

2. Technical accuracy

3. Low scores

4. Consequences

5. Teachers' role

6. Cost

1. New formats and reporting

New assessments such as performance tasks and portfolios look nothing like the fill-in-the-bubble tests that most people remember. For instance, there is often no single right answer, the methods for scoring are less obvious, results do not lend themselves to nationwide comparisons, and the new assessments measure student performance against standards rather than against fellow students.

In addition, the way scores are reported can seem highly complex at first, and new scoring systems can seem strange and unwieldy, with scales ranging from 0-140, for example.

Questions people are asking:

- Why do these tests look different?
- What is a performance test?
- What is a portfolio?
- Why are we changing? What was wrong with the old tests? We used them for 50 years.
- I succeeded on the old tests, so why does my child need these new tests?
- Why do these tests take so much more time for students to take?
- Why did some students who did well on the old tests do poorly on the new tests?
- How do I know how my child's scores compare to others in the nation?
- Why does this report card look different and have so many numbers?

Tips/strategies:

- Mix familiar test item formats with new formats to ease the transition from traditional to more innovative assessment. When Kentucky's reforms came under attack, education officials rethought their approach to assessment. As a result, the statewide annual exam now includes familiar multiple-choice questions along with performance tasks.
- Relate to known measures. Using more than one type of test is important. For example, some states and districts use traditional norm-referenced tests along with newer criterion-referenced tests (for definitions of these terms, see sidebar). The use of more familiar tests during the introduction of new ones can provide a helpful comparison that smoothes the transition for many people.
- Be aware, however, that new assessments will seem less credible if they show improvement while performance on more established standardized tests remains low or drops. In Edmonds, Washington, officials made a concerted effort to halt a decline in scores on a familiar and long-standing norm-referenced exam, even as performance on a newer criterion-referenced test was rising. Until scores on both tests improved, the credibility of all the reforms was at stake, said Sylvia Soholt, the community relations manager of the Edmonds School District.
- Prepare teachers and administrators to understand and explain new formats and scoring. Teachers are most parents' first source of information about their children's schools, and teachers are likely to be in charge of administering the new tests.
- Demystify new test formats. One way to address concerns about new formats is to show examples of test questions and exercises. In Kentucky, parents have access to sample assessment questions, as do parents and the public in Washington, Colorado and Maryland.

ASSESSMENT TYPES

A norm-referenced test is designed to provide a relative comparison of a student's test score with the scores of students in a group, such as a nationally representative sample. The average score is always the 50th percentile, meaning half the students taking the test will score above the 50th percentile and half below. "The fact that a student scores at the 60th percentile in mathematics, for example, indicates she fares as well or better than 60% of her peers not how many mathematical skills she has mastered."[10]

A test referenced to a criterion or standard is designed to provide a clear picture of what a student knows and can do. It yields an absolute rather than comparative description of student achievement against a criterion or standard. Student scores are not dependent on the portion of other students who meet the standard. Thus, average scores may be high or low depending on students' knowledge of the criterion or standard. In some cases, a student may be assigned a level of proficiency, such as advanced, proficient, *or* partially proficient *on individual standards.*

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2. Technical accuracy

The format of the test items could spark heated discussions over whether they are technically sound, reliable and even fair. In addition, parents and community members looking at new tests will suddenly have reason to reexamine the standards and may begin questioning their validity as well. Parents may discover from examining an assessment that students are expected to meet high standards in problem solving, for example, and they might decide they oppose this standard.

Questions people are asking:

- Are these tests fair?
- Why should we have confidence in these new methods? Can you prove these tests are technically sound?
- Portfolios are nice, but can they really be scored reliably?
- Are you using my child as a guinea pig to test unproven practices?
- How do these new tests compare to older ones in scoring reliability? Why are we testing estimating skills in math (or problem solving, etc.)?

Tips/strategies:

- Test reliability comes from consistency in scoring. Use the most reliable assessments you can afford and try to avoid unveiling new tests on a large scale until you can demonstrate reliability and validity over time. In Kentucky, the mathematics portfolio is a valuable classroom learning tool, but it is not considered ready for use as an assessment that determines student grades or promotion. Until the math portfolio is psychometrically sound, it will remain in an R&D mode. This practice may be worth emulating since research shows that parents like portfolios but doubt that these and other innovative assessments, such as performance tasks, can be scored as reliably as traditional standardized tests.

3. Low scores

New statewide assessments based on rigorous academic standards undoubtedly will yield low scores in the first several years. This situation is bound to prompt protests among parents of both high- and low-scoring students. Parents of high-achieving students may want to know if low scores will affect their child's chances of getting accepted into college. Meanwhile, parents of students in demographic groups that have traditionally under-performed on past assessments may dispute the new test if it appears to reinforce equity gaps. Parents in both cases are likely to question legitimacy of the tests and the school's instructional program.

Questions people are asking:

- Why should I support a test that shows my child is less accomplished than I thought? What is wrong with the school if the students are scoring so poorly?
- Will the scores make my child a less desirable college candidate?
- If these new tests are so great, why are they reinforcing inequities?
- Doesn't the preponderance of low scores mean the tests are not valid?
- How long before we start seeing good scores?
- If performance is this bad, why should we continue to support the public school system as it is currently organized?

Tips/strategies:

- It is crucial to set realistic expectations about performance on assessments so the reality of low scores is not a shock. According to Kate Nolan at New Standards, it can take three years to show genuine improvement on new assessments because students and teachers need time to get used to the tests and new teaching and learning methods that accompany reforms. Nolan warns that early rises in scores can be deceiving because they are not always lasting, information that could prove valuable in setting up realistic expectations.

- In addition to setting realistic expectations, educators and policymakers need to have set the stage for new assessments so their community knows the purpose is not to punish low performance but rather to pinpoint areas of low achievement that need to be strengthened and to measure progress generally.
- State assessment programs can benefit from a combination of test items from the previous traditional and the new test. In the Michigan Assessment of Educational Progress, a subset of items from the previous test was used during the first two years of the new reading test. State officials were able to show that it was the change in the test, rather than dramatic changes in the schools, that led to the lower scores.
- Policymakers have to make sure their tests are fair and reliable and wait several years before attaching serious consequences that could affect students' ability to graduate. Some states, however, are considering rewarding high performance through endorsements in the early years and phasing in high stakes sanctions over time.
- Education leaders also should work with employers and colleges and universities to gain their endorsement of the assessment. If admissions officers and business leaders publicly and repeatedly express their approval of the assessment and the importance of the knowledge and skills it measures, parents and students may be more willing to accept initial low scores.

4. Consequences

To have an impact, assessment has to mean something. Eventually, for example, it must play a large role in determining whether a student is promoted to the next grade, whether a school is performing well or even whether a teacher should receive a raise. Everyone — students, teachers, principals and parents — who might be affected by the consequences of assessment scores will want to know exactly what is at stake. And it will be crucial to prepare people well in advance.

Questions people are asking:

- Should low scores keep students from graduating?
- Should school receive rewards and sanctions on the basis of students' scores on the new assessment?
- What happens to students and schools that don't do well on the tests?
- How soon will you know tests are legally defensible?
- What happens to students who can't pass the assessment?
- What will the school system do to help students or schools with poor scores?

Tips/strategies:

- Don't attach high stakes to new assessments right away. The first test administration might be designed to provide baseline data from which to show improvements. Stakes can be applied in later years when the tests' reliability and validity are established.
- Sampling designs determine whether stakes can be attached to results for schools or students. Most states reduce costs by sampling students at a grade level, thus providing school-level data rather than individual data.

5. Teachers' role

Research shows most parents get most of their information about schools from their children's teachers, which means teachers need to be as well informed as possible about why the tests are necessary, how they work, how to read reports of results and what scores mean. Teachers also need to understand the new assessments thoroughly because they will be administering and, in some cases, scoring the new tests. Training teachers to administer, grade and explain new assessments is a major professional development effort requiring substantial funding and back-up materials. Teachers also will need help in using assessment results to improve classroom instruction and report assessment results to students and parents.

Questions people are asking:

- Didn't teachers learn how to use these new tests in college?
- Why are teachers being taken out of classrooms to learn about these new tests?
- If these tests are so good, why can't my child's teacher explain to me how they work?
- Are we paying for teachers to learn how to use these tests?
- Can't teachers learn about the new tests on their own time?

Tips/strategies:

- Maryland hires several hundred teachers for summer scoring sessions of the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program. Last summer, the sessions trained some 700 teachers in how the new assessments work, how to explain the assessments to parents and colleagues, and how to build strong teacher support and understanding. The scoring sessions have proved to be among the most effective professional development efforts ever, according to Ron Peiffer, Maryland assistant state superintendent for school and community outreach.
- Washington is helping teachers to understand and use various types of assessments to inform instructional decisions and as a teaching tool to motivate students. When legislators created the Commission on Student Learning to oversee the assessment development process, they also charged the Commission with conducting a comprehensive and long-term professional development program to ensure teachers and administrators understand and can use new assessments. The Assessment Training Institute of Portland, Oregon, through 16 regional centers provides materials to district teams and school faculties to learn about new ideas regarding effective assessment practices and provide opportunities to apply principles of sound assessment.

6. Cost

The cost of teachers' professional development and the expense of creating, administering and scoring new exams certainly will prompt debate, particularly with education funding already so scarce. Poor scores may even prompt discussion about whether the public education system as it is currently set up is worth supporting. High scores will prompt discussion of whether improvements are needed and cost effective.

Questions people are asking:

- How much did these tests cost to develop?
- Is this a good use of my tax dollars?
- Why are these tests so expensive? Why should taxpayers pay more for these tests when students are doing worse than on previous exams?
- Wouldn't it be cheaper to use an "off-the-shelf" test? Why do we have to develop our own?
- Why do we have to pay for teacher training to administer these tests?
- Why are we spending so much money on an education system that our own assessments show to be at a point beyond repair?

Tips/strategies:

- Address the need for new tests "head-on." Standards require custom-developed tests that assess student progress on each standard. "Off-the-shelf" tests may not be a good match to a state's or community's standards.
- Be clear about the costs up front. In one state, the legislature passed a comprehensive bill for a standards-led system without knowing the estimated cost of a new assessment program. Several years later when it came time to make the appropriation, the legislature balked.

- Costs of new assessments are often related to test development and administration. Adding multiple choice items to a test already rich in performance tasks, like Kentucky recently did, can reduce administration and scoring costs while providing more information on student knowledge in core content areas. Other strategies to reduce assessment costs could include reducing the number of students tested, the number of grades tested, or the frequency of testing — but this also reduces the amount of information, as well.
- Use professional development resources to involve educators in developing and scoring the new assessment. These activities serve as important professional development opportunities and lead to changes in instruction — an important goal of a standards-led system.

CONCLUSION

As the standards movement gives way to its second phase — assessment — education policymakers and public involvement professionals must focus on learning from the past as they begin equipping themselves for the future.

Lessons from recent years clearly indicate a need to address policy development and public involvement *together* for education improvements to succeed. That means involving the community in the development of new policies *as they are being created* and not afterwards. It also means listening first to people's concerns, then acting in ways that address them.

Because standards-led policies in education are so new, there is no blueprint for how to make them successful. For this reason, ECS is especially grateful to the people who shared their early experiences so we in turn could capture some of what they are learning in this guide and share it with a wider audience.

ENDNOTES

1. Education Commission of the States. *Listen, Discuss and Act: Parents and Teachers Views on Education Reform.* Report No. AN-96-2. Denver: ECS, 1996.

2. *Listen, Discuss and Act: Parents' and Teachers' Views on Education Reform.*

3. *Listen, Discuss and Act: Parents' and Teachers' Views on Education Reform.*

4. *Listen, Discuss and Act: Parents' and Teachers' Views on Education Reform.*

5. Shepard, Lorrie A., and Carribeth Bliem. *Parent's Thinking About Standardized Tests and Performance Assessments.* Education Researcher, Vol. 24, No. 8, 1995.

6. *Parent's Thinking About Standardized Tests and Performance Assessments.*

7. Public Agenda. *First Things First: What Americans Expect from the Public Schools.* New York: Public Agenda, 1994.

8. *First Things First: What Americans Expect from the Public Schools.*

9. Public Agenda: *Assignment Incomplete: The Unfinished Business of Education Reform.* New York: Public Agenda, 1995.

10. Education Commission of the States. *Assessing Student Progress on Standards.* Report No. SI-97-3. Denver: ECS, 1997.

RESOURCES FOR COMMUNICATING ABOUT STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

A-Plus Communications
Arlington Courthouse Plaza I
2200 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 1102
Arlington, VA 22201
703-524-7325
FAX: 703-528-9692

Resources: *Engaging the Public* offers tips on how to build public support for improving public education. The article explains why many well-intentioned reform efforts are failing, and how to use the tools of politics, marketing and communications to engage the public.

What is My Child Learning in Middle School? A Parent's Guide to Standards in the Middle Grades. This brochure developed for the Minneapolis Public Schools describes standards to parents in jargon-free language. It includes what standards are, why they are needed, how to know whether students are meeting the standards, and how to help students rise to the challenge of standards. Also included are 10 questions parents should ask to ensure that their child's school is the right school for the child.

Learning the Basics. This calendar created for the Edmonds (WA) School District explains curriculum frameworks in subjects such as reading, writing, geometry and public speaking. Each month features skills students must learn in a different subject. The calendar also explains how the curriculum frameworks were created.

Preparing Students for a Changing World, a pamphlet created for community members in the Edmonds (WA) school district, identifies goals for what students should know and be able to do, and also designates goals for what the community should do to help students succeed. An easy-to-understand graphic shows how academic categories and skill categories are inter-related and woven together like a tapestry.

What Washington Wants reports the results of a state-wide poll in Washington which surveyed the public's attitudes towards public education. Includes valuable public opinion data on standards, assessment, teaching and more. Created for the Washington Partnership for Learning.

A Clearer Picture shows how the Edmonds (WA) School District uses alternative assessment methods to measure whether students are meeting standards. This brochure, created for parents and other interested community members, discusses portfolios, internships, and methods to assess individual improvement on standardized tests.

Philadelphia Teacher, Volume 1, Number 6 (April 1996), a newsletter for teachers in the Philadelphia School District published by the Children Achieving Challenge, explains the process one district used to review standards and the obstacles that were faced. The issue also offers tips for teachers on how to motivate students to meet high academic standards.

Philadelphia Teacher, Volume 1, Number 10 (October 1996). This issue explores the theories of alternative assessment, including how to talk to students and parents about assessment, and using rubrics to help teachers show students what is expected of them.

Philadelphia Teacher, Volume 2, Number 1 (November 1996), this edition examines how assessment reform is changing classroom practices and student work for Philadelphia teachers. Also featured are articles on performance assessment and using portfolios.

Annenberg/CPB Math and Science Coalition
Annenberg/CPB Math and Science Projects
901 E Street NW
Washington, DC 20004
202-879-9650
FAX: 202-783-1036

Resources: The Annenberg/CPB Math and Science Coalition has funded a number of excellent public involvement projects in mathematics and science reform. They are included in *Building Better Math & Science: A Resource Catalog for Forward Thinking Schools and Communities*, 1995.

Belden & Russonello, R/S/M and A-Plus
Joint Research and Communications Project on Education
1250 I Street NW, Suite 460
Washington, D.C. 20005
202-879-2400
FAX: 202-789-0022

Resources: *Priority One: Schools That Work* published by the California Public Education Partnership is a 1996 survey of exploring what Californians want from their public schools. The research team also has analyzed focus group and survey data on many other communities involved in standards development and reform.

Business Roundtable
1615 L Street NW, Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20036-5610
202-872-1260
FAX: 202-466-3509

Resources: The *Business Leaders Guide to Setting Academic Standards* describes standards and how they work, options for involvement and examples of business leaders being successfully involved in setting standards.

Coalition for Goals 2000
Coalition for Goals 2000
School of Education and Human Development
The George Washington University
Washington, DC 20052.
202-835-2000
FAX: 202-659-4494

Setting Standards, Meeting Standards: Creating High Performance Schools. Available Fall 1997, this guide will lay out a nine-step process for improving schools that already is working in two communities and is now being tested and refined in several other school districts. Chapters provide specific advice on how to develop content standards, build community support, reorganize schools and central office, provide professional development, hold students accountable, hold staff accountable and hold the community accountable.

The project will produce a short book, a CD-ROM (with more detailed information and useful tools ranging from sample standards to meeting agendas) and access to the Goal Line on-line service (which will provide timely updates and serve as a mechanism for interactive communications among participating communities).

Consortium for Policy Research in Education
University of Pennsylvania
Graduate School of Education
3440 Market Street, Suite 560
Philadelphia, PA 19104
215-573-0700
FAX: 215-573-7914

If you look at 100 years of industrial history, there's nothing close to the one-to-one link between education and the economy that we assume today. I think the way we think about education is terribly constrained by the assumption that we're in trouble, that we're in decline, and that the decline is intimately, causally linked to what's wrong with education." — Mike Rose, education professor, University of California at Los Angeles, *The New York Times*, March 16, 1997

Resources: *Achieving Consensus: Setting the Agenda for State Curriculum Reform* by D. Massell and published in S. Fuhrman and R. Elmore, eds., *Governing Curriculum* examines four states' approaches to standards-setting: California, Kentucky, South Carolina and Vermont. The two different styles of agenda-setting outlined are "populist" and "professional elite," which determine who participates in the process and when. The article also discusses these styles' affect on the quality and shape of the final products, the legitimacy of state leadership and the translation from policy to practice.

Education Commission of the States
707 17th Street, Suite 2700
Denver, CO 80202-3427
303-299-3600
FAX: 303-296-8332

Resources: *Listen, Discuss and Act: Parents' and Teachers' Views on Education Reform* summarizes the findings from a 1995 survey of 2,700 parents and parent/teacher/student focus groups in eight New American School sites across the country conducted by research firms of Belden & Russonello and R/S/M. The report relates what those teachers, parents and students had to say about education improvement ideas, their rating of the public schools and their views on standards, assessment, professional development and accountability.

Communicating About Restructuring is a guide to how to talk about reform and listen to what community members have to say. It includes tips on how to build public support, get the message out and work with the media.

How to Deal with Community Criticism of School Change provides guidelines to help educators talk plainly about school restructuring, respond to community concerns, disseminate information, work successfully with the media and understand how critics of reform interpret education terms. (Co-published with the Association for Curriculum Development.)

What Communities Should Know and Be Able To Do About Education is a workbook designed to help individuals or groups interested in improving math and science education build the sense of community needed to bring about fundamental change in the classroom.

Standards & Education: A Roadmap for State Policymakers includes evidence that standards work, case studies of three states, lessons learned about policy implementation and a short discussion of how to align other policies to support standards.

A Policymaker's Guide to Standards-Led Assessment is a policymakers' guide to a standards-led assessment system. Created in collaboration with CRESST (see below) this guide helps policymakers understand the role of new assessments in a standards-led system and some of the policy and practice challenges state and local leaders will face.

Mathematics and Science Standards: A Policymaker's Primer includes information on why standards are necessary, how they differ from past reforms, the key ideas in mathematics and science standards and other related resources.

National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (CRESST)
CRESST/UCLA
10920 Wilshire Blvd. Suite 900
Los Angeles, CA 90024-1522
310-206-1532
FAX: 310-825-3883

Resources: *Five Years of CRESST Research on CD-ROM* contains almost all CRESST research from 1991-1996, including 65 technical reports, videos and newsletters.

Reforming Schools by Reforming Assessment: Consequences of the Arizona Student Assessment Program (ASAP): Equity and Teacher Capacity Building describes the impact of the state assessment on teachers' instructional practices.

An Analysis of Parent Opinions and Changes in Opinions Regarding Standardized Tests, Teachers' Information and Performance Assessment reports research of interviews with parents on their perceptions and utility of different test formats.

Portfolio-Driven Reform: Vermont Teachers' Understanding of Mathematical Problem Solving and Related Changes in Classroom Practice describes changes in teachers' instruction related to policy changes in assessment.

The Politics of State Testing: Implementing New Student Assessments discusses political strategies and consequences of implementing state assessment systems based on standards.

The Politics of Assessment: A View from the Political Culture of Arizona describes the political climate in which the Arizona Student Assessment Program was developed and implemented.

Policymakers' Views of Student Assessment describes results of interviews with state-level policymakers on their multiple and sometimes incompatible expectations for assessment programs.

Performance-Based Assessment and What Teachers Need reports on the knowledge and training teachers need to use performance tasks effectively.

Teachers' Developing Ideas and Practice About Mathematics Performance Assessment: Successes, Stumbling Blocks and Implications for Professional Development reports classroom research on teachers' experience implementing performance tasks and how districts can facilitate teachers' learning.

Assessment and Instruction in the Science Classroom describes teachers' efforts to use science assessments and the impacts on their instruction.

Standards-Based Assessment: Technical and Policy Issues in Measuring School and Student Progress is a report on the issues a policymaker or assessment designer needs to consider when designing a standards-led assessment system. Some of the issues include building state and local consensus, using standards to align assessments, defining levels of performance, linking assessment results to accountability and stakes and building local capacity.

The National Education Goals Panel
1255 22nd Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
202-632-0952
FAX: 202-632-0957
Web: www.negp.gov
E-Mail: NEGP@goalline.org

Resources: *Commonly Asked Questions about Standards and Assessments*. An excellent summary that includes good examples of content standards, performance standards and the new kinds of assessments being used in places such as Connecticut, Maryland and Kentucky — plus helpful advice for educators, policymakers and parents.

National Governors' Association (NGA)
444 North Capitol St., N.W.
Washington, DC 20001-1512
301-498-3738
FAX: 301-206-9789

Resources: *A Guide to Building Public Support for Education Reform* shows how governors and states have worked on involving the public in education reform. It focuses on important strategies to consider during the process of building public support for education reform and highlights state strategies for communicating about progress toward achieving the National Education Goals and for promoting statewide systemic education reform.

Communicating With the Public About Education Reform is a resource guide for governors and their staff on communicating to the public about education reform. It includes short commentaries from state-level officials and public involvement experts.

New Standards
National Center on Education and the Economy
700 11th Street, N.W., Suite 750
Washington, D.C. 20001
202-783-3668
FAX: 202-783-3672

Resources: *Effective Public Engagement* is a handbook for those who must talk with the public and media about the issues New Standards cares about — higher standards, performance assessment and better schools. Public Agenda conducted focus groups on New Standards issues which are presented as findings with suggested responses for each. This handbook also includes a description of how to manage the dynamics of change and communication and 11 rules of thumb to guide communication.

Public Agenda
6 East 39th St.
New York, NY 10016-0112
212-686-6610
FAX: 212-889-3461

Resources: *Assignment Incomplete: The Unfinished Business of Education Reform* is Public Agenda's 1995 survey of national attitudes toward education.

First Things First: What Americans Expect From the Public Schools is a 1994 national survey of public attitudes about education indicating the public wants safety, order and discipline.

Crosstalk: The Public, the Experts, and Competitiveness is a research report describing the gaps in understanding between leaders and citizens on the interrelated issues of education, workforce training and U.S. competitiveness (conducted and produced in association with the Business-Higher Education Forum).

Public Education Fund Network
601 Thirteenth Street NW
Suite 290 North
Washington, DC 20005
202-628-7460
FAX: 202-628-1893

Resources: *Connections* (Spring 1994) reports interviews and case studies for parental and public involvement and how to make it work. It also includes good coverage of most contested issues and a strong section on how to respond to concerns and develop general communication strategies. The Public Education Fund Network also has a rich database of public involvement efforts from successful local education funds.

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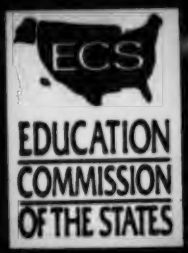

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